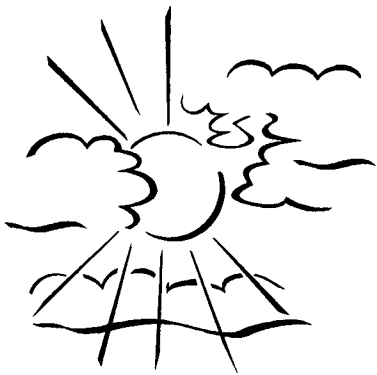


***Department
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, October 31, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Police: Sexually abused girl, 8, was victim again in foster care

Detectives upset by case, calling it one of their worst

*By Kelly Hassett
Lansing State Journal
Published October 31, 2005*

An 8-year-old Lansing girl thought she was saved this spring when authorities removed her from what they said was a sexually abusive home and placed her with a foster parent.

Her new home turned out to be just as dangerous as the old one.

Police say another foster child sexually assaulted her while she was in foster care.

Lansing police detectives say it is among the worst of the dozens of child sexual abuse cases they tackle each year.

And they say it shows how the foster-care system can fail the children it is supposed to help.

"These kids are the real victims," said Lansing police Detective Teresa Eisfelder, who handled the two cases involving the girl.

"Of all the policies and procedures that we put into place to safeguard against this, it still got messed up."

The girl, now 9, has been placed in a different foster home.

Officials at Michigan's Department of Human Services - which runs the state's foster care system - would not comment on the case and whether anything could have been done to prevent it.

But Eisfelder's frustration remains.

"There's got to be a way to do things differently," the 15-year department veteran said.

A child's plight

The young girl's plight came to authorities' attention in early April.

She was removed from her home after a report of suspected child abuse, Eisfelder said.

In an interview with a child advocate, she reluctantly said her stepfather - Alphonso Smith - had sex with her and shut her in a dog cage with dogs when she had "accidents" in her pants.

Smith, who's charged with assaulting and abusing her over a two-year period, underwent psychiatric evaluation after he was arraigned on criminal sexual conduct and child-abuse charges, court records show.

His attorney, Gene Turnwald, said he and his client are awaiting the results of those tests to determine if Smith is competent to stand trial.

"These are very traumatic and horrible cases to deal with on all different kinds of levels," Turnwald said.

Abused again

The girl was placed with a foster parent after her stepfather's arrest.

Several weeks later during another interview, the girl reported that while visiting relatives of her foster parent on April 24, a 13-year-old foster child in the relatives' house sexually assaulted her, court records show.

The report appalled Eisfelder and Lansing police Lt. Larry Klaus.

"It's not just the parents. You've got to look at the kids," Klaus said.

The 13-year-old boy accused in the assault pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of gross indecency and was sent to an Iowa facility that treats boys for sexually aggressive behavior, court records show. He can't have unsupervised contact with children, and he was ordered to write a letter of apology to the girl.

Restrictions in place

Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said the office can't comment about specific cases but does have restrictions about placing children in homes where there are adjudicated juvenile sex offenders.

State officials would be notified if a foster child has prior criminal charges, but would not necessarily be notified of complaints or problems that didn't rise to the level of a criminal charge, she said.

If there is a report of abuse under the care of a foster parent, there is an investigation and a recommendation as to whether to maintain the license of that foster parent, Sorbet said.

Director Karen Stock, who also declined to talk about specific cases, said steps are taken when any child is hurt under foster care for any reason, but sometimes it's not possible to control everything.

Social-service workers wish they could protect children against every possible risk, she said.

"It's frustrating that that is not the case," Stock said.

Safe at last

The girl is now doing as well as can be expected, Eisfelder said. She monitors the girl's progress through other social-service workers who counsel the girl. But the road ahead will be difficult.

If there's any good that's come out of Eisfelder's case, the detective said it's that the girl is finally removed from a dangerous home - and possible future abuse.

"Because she told and kept telling, we were able to do an investigation," Eisfelder said.

"She's now safe."

Contact Kelly Hassett at 267-1301 or khasett@lsj.com.

Coping after abuse

Child victims of sexual abuse are shackled with guilt and "faulty" thinking about what is appropriate behavior, said Leisa Fuller, a crisis counselor with Angel House, a Mason emergency shelter for physically or sexually abused children scheduled to open before the end of 2005.

"Some of the important messages that we send is that this is not their fault, that they're brave," she said. Therapist Barb Walkington at Michigan State University's Sexual Assault Program works with young adults who have a history of sexual violence.

Sexual abuse at a young age is more apt to affect a child's identity than if the abuse happens later, she said.

"A child feels as if it's something about them, that they're bad," Walkington said. "(But) if children receive good treatment, these things can be reversed."

Halloween bill hard to enforce, police say - 10/28/2005

A proposed state law would ban sex offenders from handing out candy or participating in Halloween-related activities.

October 28, 2005

rayk@monroenews.com

By RAY KISONAS

A proposed law that would prohibit sex offenders from handing out candy on Halloween or even turning their porch lights on is a good idea but would be difficult to enforce, local law enforcement officials said.

House Bill 5377, introduced Thursday in the Michigan House of Representatives, would make it illegal for paroled sex offenders to turn on their exterior lights during Halloween to give the impression the house is open for trick-or-treaters.

Monroe County Sheriff Tilman Crutchfield said he supports such a proposal, but it appears officers would have to catch people in the act.

"It is a good idea, but it would be difficult to enforce," the sheriff said. "It would be very difficult to prove unless that person was standing at the door handing out candy."

For it to work, he said, police officers would have to be provided a list of sex offenders. Officers then would have to drive around checking addresses and then catch the person in the act.

Because deputies have a limited amount of available time, especially on Halloween, personnel issues would come into play.

"We would need to know where the sex offenders are so we can check on them," Sheriff Crutchfield said. "And there is only a two-hour time frame for the entire county. I don't think it's a bad law; it would just be difficult to enforce."

State Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford, introduced the bill, which is aimed at protecting children from sexual predators who could use Halloween to lure children. The bill would prohibit offenders from handing out candy to children and having their exterior lights on to convey they are distributing candy, as well as barring them from participating in other related activities on Oct. 31 or any other date designated by a municipality for the observance of Halloween.

"We should not allow sex offenders such easy access to trusting children," Rep. Amos said.

"This is a way to protect kids from people that are interesting in harming them and help them to have a happy and safe Halloween experience."

Sheriff Crutchfield added that he supports any law that is aimed at protecting the public, even if it would be difficult to enforce. Another law on the books, he said, could sway an offender from pursuing such ideas.

"It might serve as a deterrent," he said. "And if it did deter even a handful, then it would be worth it."

Under the bill, violators could be sent back to prison if convicted.

The bill was referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

Girl, 14, survives alleged kidnapping

Monday, October 31, 2005

By Scott Hagen
shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A 14-year-old Jackson County girl is recovering after surviving multiple assaults and being bound and left for dead in woods east of Hillsdale.

Mark Urban, 26, was arraigned Friday in Hillsdale County on four felony counts stemming from the assaults, which are alleged to have occurred early Thursday. They include two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, a count of kidnapping and a count of attempted murder.

Urban and the girl were acquainted, said Hillsdale County Sheriff Stan Burchardt, who declined to disclose details about the relationship.

Urban was scheduled to appear Thursday morning in Jackson County Circuit Court to be sentenced on a guilty plea of assault with intent to commit criminal sexual conduct from an arrest earlier this year, said Mark Blumer, chief assistant prosecutor for Jackson County.

Blumer also said there are lingering sexual assault charges from Indiana against Urban that have yet to be unresolved.

Burchardt said Urban, who lives in Hillsdale but is originally from Jackson, picked up the girl in southern Jackson County to go for a ride.

But something went wrong and she "became frightened," Burchardt said. He refused her requests to go home.

"She wanted to go home and he wouldn't take her," Burchardt said. "He didn't like that."

At about 3:30 a.m., Urban brought the girl to a home on Holcomb Road, where he raped her and continued to beat her, police said. He then bound her legs and wrists and threw her in the trunk of his car. He drove her to a state game area in Adams Township, east of Hillsdale, forced her to undress and sexually assaulted her numerous times, police said.

Urban then threatened to kill the girl, made her get dressed and drove her to a vacant house on Mauck Road in Hillsdale Township where he tied her up and gagged her, brought her into a heavily wooded area and threw her on the ground, police said.

At some point, she either went unconscious or played unconscious. Urban covered her with weeds and leaves and left her in the woods about 4:45 a.m. where pre-dawn temperatures hovered in the 30s, police said.

"She was able to work herself loose and ran to several houses before she found someone (on Mauck Road) that came to the door," Burchardt said.

The girl described her attacker to police, who arrested Urban about two hours later. He will stay in jail until his next court date Nov. 9.

October 29, 2005

Man gets 10 years for trying to kill kids

FROM RECORD EAGLE STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY - A local man who attempted to kill his children will serve at least 10 years in prison.

Ricky Harhold, 47, was sentenced Friday to 120 to 180 months in prison by 13th Circuit Court Judge Philip Rodgers Jr. Harhold pleaded guilty this month to two counts of first-degree child abuse.

In March, Harhold admitted he used natural and propane gases to try to kill his son and daughter at the family's East Bay Township home. He then intentionally crashed his car into a tree near Hammond and High Lake roads.

"They are going to ask me why I did what I did, and right now I have no answer," said Harhold.

"I had no reason to do what I did to them."

Before the plea deal, Harhold faced two counts of attempted homicide and two counts of assault with intent to murder, all life offenses.

Plea to sex charges may earn 20-60 years in prison

A Chesterfield Township man who worked with troubled youths pleaded no contest to 14 counts, including first-degree criminal sexual conduct, Friday in Macomb County Circuit Court.

Timothy W. Myers, 32, was arraigned in June on 26 criminal counts after investigators found several hundred images of child pornography on his computers and digital camera they confiscated.

Officials said the plea is treated as an admission of guilt. He could be sentenced to 20-60 years in prison.

He is in the Macomb County Jail in Mt. Clemens awaiting a Dec. 6 sentencing.

By Christy Arboscello

CRIME

Man who flashed girls may have struck again

Center Line police say the man who flashed himself to children in two incidents Thursday may be the same man who flashed two girls near Miller Elementary School on Wednesday.

Police said the man, driving a black Jeep Grand Cherokee, returned to Miller Elementary, 23855 Lawrence in Center Line, about 8:15 a.m. Thursday. As two children were getting on a bus, he opened his car door and exposed himself. He then drove near Peck Elementary School, 11300 Engleman, in Warren, and exposed himself to a girl, 9.

Anyone with any information is asked to call Center Line police at 586-757-2200.

By Dan Cortez

10/29
+
D F P

Ex-youth worker faces child porn charges

10/30
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHESTERFIELD TWP. — A former manager at an Upper Peninsula group home for troubled youths pleaded no contest to charges filed after investigators found hundreds of images of child pornography on his computers and a digital camera.

Timothy Wayne Myers, 32, was charged in June with 26 counts in-

cluding possessing and distributing child pornography, including images of himself engaging in sex acts with young boys, authorities said.

The resident of Macomb County's Chesterfield Township pleaded Friday to 14 counts.

No contest pleas are not admissions of guilt under Michigan law but are treated as such for sentencing purposes.

Myers remained jailed pending a Dec. 6 sentencing hearing. He could receive 20 to 60 years in prison.

Authorities said Myers, who is married and has two children, produced and distributed the child pornography from his wife's parents' home in Chesterfield Township and from Manistique, where he worked at the Indian River Teaching Family Home.

October 29, 2005

Charges filed for alleged inmate attack

Two charged with criminal sexual conduct

By SHERI MCWHIRTER

Record-Eagle staff writer

GAYLORD - Three Otsego County Jail inmates were charged with criminal sexual conduct or assault in an alleged attack on a 14-year-old inmate.

Eric Robinson, 19, and Douglas Schuster, 17, both of Vanderbilt, were arraigned Friday in 87th District Court on charges of criminal sexual conduct in the fourth degree as habitual offenders, a three-year maximum sentence.

Robinson and Schuster were also charged with assault, a 93-day misdemeanor.

Kristov Tackett, 23, of Gaylord, was arraigned on a misdemeanor assault charge.

Schuster is accused of allegedly rubbing his bare posterior on the 14-year-old during a Sept. 22 encounter. Robinson is charged with alleged sexual contact while both he and the victim were fully clothed, grabbing the victim from behind.

Tackett is charged with assault for allegedly forcing the victim's head into the toilet.

"We have very solid cases," said Otsego County Prosecutor Kyle Legel.

Legel said some inmates consider such incidents a type of jailhouse hazing.

Kristeen Marcinkowski, the victim's mother, said she wasn't sure the three teens would be held accountable.

"I'm glad that justice is going to happen. I'm disgusted that this happened. Any parent would be," Marcinkowski said.

The 14-year-old is held on breaking and entering and home invasion charges. He was waived into adult court after he received 18 charges on his juvenile record, mostly for breaking and entering.

Marcinkowski was also charged with concealing a weapon and as an after-the-fact accessory to her son in alleged breaking and entering incidents in July. She is free on bond.

Robinson and Schuster are currently serving sentences for felony larceny of a building and Tackett for felony attempted assault.

Lansing State Journal Editorial

October 29, 2005

Scary legislation

Protecting children from sexual predators is a necessary and worthwhile goal. But there are smart ways to protect them, and dumb ways.

Here's a dumb way: prohibiting sex offenders from passing out Halloween treats. That's right.

State Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford, introduced a bill this week that would prohibit convicted sex offenders from handing out candy or having their porch lights on for trick-or-treaters.

If this became law, how, exactly, would local police enforce it? Post lookouts on every street where sex offenders live and see if their porch lights came on? Would a relative of a sex offender living under the same roof also be prohibited from giving out candy?

Someone please bury this bill.

Children's advocate recalled for tireless effort

Monday, October 31, 2005

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

Laureen Kennedy had no children, yet she cared for so many youngsters.

As executive director of Kent Regional Community Coordinated Child Care (Kent 4C) for 18 years, Ms. Kennedy worked to make sure children in West Michigan were cared for by well-trained child-care providers.

Funeral services were to be today for Ms. Kennedy, who died at her home Friday after a battle with cancer. She was 67.

"She made the entire community's children her own," said Deb VanderMolen, who succeeded her as executive director.

Ms. Kennedy retired in 2003 from the nonprofit agency.

She received the 2005 Lifetime Child Advocate Award for Service to Children, presented by the Child and Family Resource Council.

She also was a teacher in Maryland, where she was the first woman to receive the Young Educator of the Year Award in Baltimore.

"Laureen was a spark plug for all issues having to do with young children and their families," VanderMolen said. "Young children don't always have a voice; Laureen was their voice."

Kent 4C -- serving Kent, Ionia, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo and Osceola counties -- provides referrals to parents looking for child care, training for child-care providers and on-site visits of child-care centers.

Under Ms. Kennedy's leadership, the agency grew from a budget of \$110,000 to more than \$1 million as it grew to serve more than 2,500 child-care providers.

Despite her retirement, she continued working until about two weeks before her death, including volunteering at United Way, VanderMolen said.

Ms. Kennedy is survived by her mother, Mary Louise Kennedy; her sisters, Mary Beth (Michael) Fochtman and Judy Helmholdt, and many nieces and nephews.

A Mass was to be at 2 p.m. at Cathedral of St. Andrew, 267 Sheldon Blvd. SE. Private burial was to follow at Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

The family asked that memorial contributions be made to Kent Regional 4-C foundation and Lacks Cancer Center.

Congress Weighs Big Cuts to Medicaid and Medicare

By ROBERT PEAR
The New York Times

Published: October 30, 2005

WASHINGTON, Oct. 29 - Congressional committees have proposed substantial cutbacks in Medicaid and Medicare, the nation's largest health insurance programs, which together cover more than one-fourth of all Americans.

The two houses of Congress are expected to approve the changes in the next two weeks as part of competing bills to slow the growth of federal spending. Negotiators from the two chambers would then try to work out the differences.

The House bill would take all of its savings from Medicaid, the program for low-income people, while leaving Medicare, the program for those 65 and older and the disabled, untouched, as the Bush administration wants. By contrast, the Senate bill would squeeze savings from both programs.

Under the House bill, states would gain sweeping authority to charge premiums, increase co-payments and trim benefits for Medicaid recipients, so benefit packages would look more like the private insurance provided by employers.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that these changes would save the federal government more than \$4 billion in the next five years, with savings of more than \$3 billion for the states.

Governors of both parties, troubled by the soaring cost of Medicaid, have been pleading with Congress to let them make such changes. They said their record on welfare showed they could be trusted with the new authority.

Under the current Medicaid law and rules, co-payments for most adults cannot exceed \$3 for goods and services like prescription drugs and visits to doctors.

The House bill, drafted by Representative Joe L. Barton, Republican of Texas, would gradually increase the maximum co-payment, to \$5 in 2008. In later years, the ceiling would rise automatically, to match increases in the consumer price index for medical care.

States could end coverage for Medicaid recipients who refused to pay premiums, and health care providers could deny services to those who failed to pay the new charges. Poor children under 18 years old would be exempt from cost-sharing requirements.

"I trust the states," said Mr. Barton, the chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Representative Nathan Deal, Republican of Georgia, said, "If people have a personal stake in the cost of their health care, they will use it more responsibly."

But Representative Tammy Baldwin, Democrat of Wisconsin, said, "Higher co-payments will lead people to forgo needed medical care."

"To listen to some of the personal responsibility arguments," Ms. Baldwin said, "one might think that people line up to see their doctors the way they line up to see a rock concert or sporting event, and the only way to control this irrational hunger or thirst for medical care is to make it more expensive. I just don't buy that."

Federal auditors and investigators have repeatedly found that Medicaid overpays pharmacies. The Senate and House bills would reduce those payments. The Senate bill would also require drug manufacturers to give larger discounts to Medicaid, a provision not included in the House bill.

Craig L. Fuller, president of the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, a trade group, said he did not understand how House Republicans could cut payments to pharmacies and increase co-payments for poor people without requiring drug manufacturers to make any contribution to the savings.

But Billy Tauzin, president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a lobbying organization for brand-name drug companies, said the price concessions required by the Senate bill could hurt Medicaid recipients and other patients by forcing drug makers to "reduce research and development of life-saving medicines."

The White House has told lawmakers that they should not tamper with Medicare. President Bush does not want Congress to alter the prescription drug benefit, scheduled to take effect Jan. 1, or other provisions of the 2003 Medicare law.

House Republican leaders followed that advice, but the Senate did not. The Senate Finance Committee voted to eliminate a \$10 billion fund that can be used to increase payments to private insurers, as an incentive for them to enter and stay in the Medicare program.

The committee chairman, Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa, said the money was not immediately needed because private plans were rushing into Medicare.

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, an independent federal panel, has urged Congress to eliminate the \$10 billion fund, saying it gives an unfair advantage to plans known as regional preferred provider organizations, or P.P.O.'s.

Karen M. Ignagni, president of America's Health Insurance Plans, an industry trade group, said, "This fund has been described as a slush fund by critics, but the reality is that beneficiaries, not health plans, will be helped by this funding."

With the extra payments, Ms. Ignagni said, more insurers would offer low-cost, high-quality benefits to people in rural areas and other markets where such options were unavailable.

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association warned Congress that if it eliminated the \$10 billion fund, it would show that "the government is an unreliable business partner." Blue Cross lobbyists said this would cause some insurers to reconsider their participation in Medicare.

Will industry spur national health care?

Friday, October 28, 2005
Kalamazoo Gazette

Remember back in the 1960s when many politicians were having apoplexy over the prospect of Medicare?

Pure socialism, they ranted. It'll break the bank!

Well, it hasn't yet, although it has become obvious that Medicare, the health-insurance program for senior citizens, and Medicaid, a companion federal-state program to aid the destitute of all ages, have become hugely expensive and require streamlining and reform.

Now comes Gov. Jennifer Granholm with a suggestion for a national health plan. Is that a risky strategy for Granholm's campaign for re-election next year?

Maybe not. This is Michigan, after all, and our auto industry is hurting. The big news recently is that Toyota will open a second auto manufacturing plant in Woodstock, Ontario, in 2008.

Toyota executives decided to forgo hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies from several American states in favor of erecting their new plant less than 25 miles from its second Ontario plant and skilled workforce in Cambridge. It is expected that the new plant will bring well-paying jobs to 1,300 workers who would make 100,000 vehicles annually.

Often, in this space, we have called attention to the importance of a community having skilled workers. That's why Michigan thrived for so many decades. The Japanese place a great importance on the abilities of the Canadian workers, much more so apparently than they did on those in southern states vying for the new plant.

The Toyota people also are aware of health-care costs. It was reported that because Canada has a taxpayer-supported national health insurance program that covers all citizens regardless of age, Toyota could save \$4 to \$5 an hour in benefits. Fortunately, the U.S. auto manufacturers and the labor unions have reached agreement on a new contract, which includes health-care provisions.

In America, excellent health care is available for seniors when they reach 65, affluent people who are covered by some type of private policy, or public health insurance for the very poor. But it's different for tens of millions of our working poor. Many of them, honest and hard-working people, have lost everything they have to an expensive illness. In this land of plenty, that's disgraceful.

All of these facts have not been lost on Granholm. The governor said Monday that some form of a national health care program -- perhaps beginning with the use of public funds to take care of catastrophic costs for citizens of all ages -- could be a starter.

Years ago, heads of big corporations and a lot of conservatives would have been aghast over such a plan. But, today, employee health-care insurance premiums are eating many industries alive.

Some otherwise unlikely allies could decide to receive Granholm's notion with at least a modicum of enthusiasm.

Meetings planned on Medicare drug plan

Monday, October 31, 2005

Muskegon Chronicle
FROM LOCAL REPORTS

the new Medicare prescription drug plan during informational meetings this week in Muskegon and Ottawa counties.

The first is 7 p.m. today at the Grand Haven Community Center, 421 Columbus, Grand Haven.

The second is 7 p.m. Tuesday in Coopersville at the old high school gym, 198 East.

The presentations will be led by an expert on the program. Call (616) 842-9210, in Grand Haven, or (616) 997-1786, in Coopersville.

The two meetings are sponsored by the North Ottawa County Council on Aging and North Ottawa Community Health System.

A third meeting is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at White Lake Community Library.

At that meeting, representatives of Bankers Life and Casualty Co. will present information about the prescription plan, a federally subsidized drug benefit offered through private insurance companies.

The enrollment period for the Medicare drug program runs from Nov. 15, 2005, through May 15, 2006. Enrollment is required to participate in the program; anyone who enrolls by Dec. 31 will receive benefits starting Jan. 1, 2006.

For those who join the program, costs will vary depending on the plan chosen. In general, participants will pay a monthly premium of \$37 and a yearly deductible, up to the first \$250 in 2006, according to the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Participants also will pay a portion of their prescription drug costs.

People with limited incomes will get more financial assistance under the Medicare plan.

Help for black mothers-to-be now just a phone call away

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Monday, October 31, 2005

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll
skirkendoll@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6366

FLINT - DeNise L. Blake feels somewhat like a grandmother to the newborn twin girls. She feels close because their mother was one of the first callers to the AFRICAN, an initiative by the Greater Flint Health Coalition to reduce the high rate of black infant deaths.

"(The twins) were 4 1/2 pounds and 4 pounds, named Dynasty and Destiney," said Blake, AFRICAN managing director. "You'd think I was the grandmother. I know all these details." AFRICAN stands for African American Family Resource Information Center and Network, and its goal is to connect mothers-to-be with community groups and government agencies that can help with such things as breast-feeding education or household needs.

Workers at the AFRICAN act as navigators, helping mothers become more than a number when working with government agencies.

Or as Leah Hayes, assistant director, puts it, helping mothers "know what to ask for."

The name of the initiative, which began in August, reflects the kinds of families they hope to help.

Black families struggle more to have healthy infants. The black infant mortality rate in Genesee County is 21 deaths for every 1,000 black babies born, three times higher than the white infant mortality rate.

"Our overall goal is to reduce the disparity in infant deaths and not only address the medical consequences but the social consequences that affect an infant death," Blake said.

The program was developed through last year's Friendly Access Infant Mortality Initiative that looked at customer service at hospitals and doctors' offices.

"What we knew is that we didn't need another service but to connect people to services already in the community," said Stephen Skorcz, coalition president.

Ardelia Mincey, 28, of Flint called the AFRICAN to learn more about safe sleep campaigns and whether support is available after the birth of her third child, due in December.

Her pregnancy feels like a countdown, Mincey said, and is filled with anxiety. In 2000, she lost a 3-month-old son to sudden infant death syndrome.

"To me he was perfect," she said.

The experience created sleepless nights for the single mother when daughter DeJanae, now 11 months, was born.

"I used to sleep in a chair next to DeJanae's bed," Mincey said. "It was like that for six months. People thought I was crazy for sleeping in that chair. I'd listen for her breathing and wait to look in her eyes when she woke up."

AFRICAN has connected Mincey with state-funded maternal support services, which will ease the transition of caring for two infants.

Blake said doctors may lack the time to address the family issues mothers face, such as safe housing, domestic violence or coaching on breast-feeding.

The coalition also hosts special sessions on universal issues of racism in health care and the community, the other factor that may influence the high infant death rate, regardless of income or insurance status, Skorcz said.

Unwed women set record with 1.5 million babies

20-somethings top list of unmarried mothers with kids

By **RANDOLPH E. SCHMID**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nearly 1.5 million babies, a record, were born to unmarried women in the United States last year, the government reported Friday. And it isn't just teenagers any more.

"People have the impression that teens and unmarried mothers are synonymous," said Stephanie Ventura of the National Center for Health Statistics.

Online

► **National Center for Health Statistics:**
www.cdc.gov/nchs

But last year teens accounted for just 24 percent of unwed births, down from 50 percent in 1970, she commented.

The increases in unmarried births have been among women in their 20s, she said, particularly those 25 to 29.

Many of the women in that age group are living with partners but still count as unmarried mothers if they haven't formally married, Ventura noted.

The 20s are the prime child-bearing years, regardless of

whether the mother is married, she said.

Among teens, more than 80 percent of mothers were unmarried.

There were 1,470,152 babies born to single women in 2004, 35.7 percent of all births in the country, NCHS said. That was up from 1,415,995 a year earlier.

Births to older women continued to increase, Brady Hamilton of NCHS pointed out, reflecting choices these women are making in terms of careers and having families.

The birth rate for women aged 35 to 39 increased 4 percent from 2003 to 2004. It was up 3 percent for women aged 40 to 44, and 9 percent for those 45 to 49.

Other findings of the report included:

► There was a total of 4,115,590 births in the country in 2004, up from 4,089,950 in 2003.

► Births to whites declined by nearly 18,000 while Hispanics were up 32,000, there was an increase of more than 8,000 in births to Asians and a rise of just 72 births among black women.

► The total birth rate was 14.0 per 1,000 women, down from 14.1 in 2003.

► The birth rate for women aged 15 to 19 was 41.2 per 1,000, down from 41.6 in 2003 and a record low. The teen birth rate was 61.8 in 1991 and has been declining since.

Michigan Report

October 28, 2005

LONG-TERM CARE LEGISLATION **INTRODUCED**

Rep. Rick Shaffer (R-Three Rivers) has introduced legislation that would implement single points of entry for residents seeking long-term care in Michigan.

Under the bill (HB 5369), the entry points would be local and regional facilities that would help with customer care, including help with financial assistance and services available.

The Department of Community Health would monitor the single points of entry.

“These entry systems have been introduced by other states which have effectively redirected resources and cut costs for consumers,” Mr. Shaffer said in a release. “This legislation is one of the most important bills introduced for long-term care consumers because of the detailed information and resources it provides.”

Several members of the Medicaid Long Term Care Task Force, including the Michigan Quality Community Care Council and Michigan Protection and Advocacy Services support the legislation.

Bills offer wellness-plan option for most workers

Friday, October 28, 2005

By Sharon Emery
Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Insurance providers serving half of Michigan's labor force -- people working for themselves or small businesses -- would be required to offer wellness programs that reward healthy behavior with reduced premiums, under legislation designed to cut health care costs. Sponsored by Sen. Tom George, R-Texas Township, the bills would allow small-business owners to buy policies offering premium rebates for employee participation in diet, exercise or smoking-cessation programs, for example. While larger, self-insured firms can offer such plans, smaller companies currently cannot.

With Michigan's smoking, obesity and jobless rates among the highest in the country, the state has much to gain from the plan, George said Thursday.

"If you could get people to pursue healthy behaviors, the potential gains are huge," he said, noting that individuals who are overweight incur \$1,500 extra in annual health care costs and smokers \$500 more.

"...Addressing this epidemic of unhealthy behaviors is needed to rescue the state's economy and is the only way to truly make Michigan healthier."

George compared the plan to auto insurance companies offering discounts for drivers who use seat belts.

The wellness plans would be offered by insurers, HMOs and nonprofit health care corporations as an option to employers. They would be based on behaviors an employee agrees to pursue, not on the employee's health status.

Spokeswoman Helen Stojic of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, which provides policies to small business, declined to comment until her group had reviewed the bills.

Keith Carey, a lobbyist for small business with the National Federation of Independent Business/Michigan, said his group welcomed the option and would review the legislation.

Carey said about 2 million people in Michigan are employed by private, nonfarm businesses with fewer than 500 employees, and that those businesses had been forced to have "candid conversations" with their employees about the role of personal responsibility in reducing health care costs.

"The problem requires fundamental change in the thought processes of folks like me .. we need to be encouraged to think long term," Carey said.

While insurers would be free to design their own products, the plans would be required to set realistic, "achievable" goals, George said.

Currently health premiums can only be based on age, occupation and region, under laws designed to prevent companies from discriminating on the basis of pre-existing conditions, George said. The plan does not change the protections for workers with pre-existing conditions and is in line with federal health insurance rules.

"This finally offers businesses some way of reducing their premiums," George said.

Will industry spur national health care?

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Friday, October 28, 2005

Remember back in the 1960s when many politicians were having apoplexy over the prospect of Medicare?

Pure socialism, they ranted. It'll break the bank!

Well, it hasn't yet, although it has become obvious that Medicare, the health-insurance program for senior citizens, and Medicaid, a companion federal-state program to aid the destitute of all ages, have become hugely expensive and require streamlining and reform.

Now comes Gov. Jennifer Granholm with a suggestion for a national health plan. Is that a risky strategy for Granholm's campaign for re-election next year?

Maybe not. This is Michigan, after all, and our auto industry is hurting. The big news recently is that Toyota will open a second auto manufacturing plant in Woodstock, Ontario, in 2008.

Toyota executives decided to forgo hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies from several American states in favor of erecting their new plant less than 25 miles from its second Ontario plant and skilled workforce in Cambridge. It is expected that the new plant will bring well-paying jobs to 1,300 workers who would make 100,000 vehicles annually.

Often, in this space, we have called attention to the importance of a community having skilled workers. That's why Michigan thrived for so many decades. The Japanese place a great importance on the abilities of the Canadian workers, much more so apparently than they did on those in southern states vying for the new plant.

The Toyota people also are aware of health-care costs. It was reported that because Canada has a taxpayer-supported national health insurance program that covers all citizens regardless of age, Toyota could save \$4 to \$5 an hour in benefits. Fortunately, the U.S. auto manufacturers and the labor unions have reached agreement on a new contract, which includes health-care provisions.

In America, excellent health care is available for seniors when they reach 65, affluent people who are covered by some type of private policy, or public health insurance for the very poor. But

it's different for tens of millions of our working poor. Many of them, honest and hard-working people, have lost everything they have to an expensive illness. In this land of plenty, that's disgraceful.

All of these facts have not been lost on Granholm. The governor said Monday that some form of a national health care program -- perhaps beginning with the use of public funds to take care of catastrophic costs for citizens of all ages -- could be a starter. Years ago, heads of big corporations and a lot of conservatives would have been aghast over such a plan. But, today, employee health-care insurance premiums are eating many industries alive. Some otherwise unlikely allies could decide to receive Granholm's notion with at least a modicum of enthusiasm.

Published October 26, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Senator's bill would ban sentencing youths to life with no chance of parole

Lawmaker calls the prison term double standard

By David Eggert
Associated Press

A state lawmaker wants to prohibit Michigan juveniles from being sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, announced a four-bill package Tuesday she said would give children convicted of violent crimes a second chance by giving them a chance for parole.

Brater said keeping people under age 18 from voting or serving on a jury while saying they're old enough to serve life in prison sets a dangerous double standard.

Advertisement

"These children have committed horrible crimes, and must be held accountable for their actions," she said. "No one is saying these individuals should get off with just a slap on the wrist, but locking them away forever ignores the fact that there is a chance they could eventually become productive members of society."

Brater and the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan cited a study by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International showing Michigan has the second-highest rate of imposing life sentences without parole on juveniles.

The ACLU says 306 prisoners in the state are serving life sentences without a chance of parole for crimes committed before the age of 18. Almost half of them committed their crimes while 16 or younger.

It is unclear, though, whether Republicans in the GOP-controlled Legislature are open to changing the law.

DeWitt Republican Alan Cropsey, who heads the Senate Judiciary Committee, said victims should not be forgotten when considering sentencing changes. "Public safety has to trump everything."

Teen is guilty of school knifing

Jury finds he intended to kill former girlfriend

October 29, 2005

BY DAN CORTEZ
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

When Eric J. Schorling plunged a 7-inch knife into the back of his ex-girlfriend, Nicole Lambert, he was trying to kill her -- following up on what he told others he would do. That's the story a 12-person jury believed about what happened at Romeo High School on Sept. 27, 2004.

On Friday, after two hours of jury deliberations in Macomb County Circuit Court, Schorling was found guilty of assault with intent to commit murder.

Arthur Garton, Schorling's attorney, said that wasn't his 17-year-old client's intent, but he failed to have the charge reduced to assault with intent to commit great bodily harm less than murder. Macomb County Assistant Prosecutor Steve Kaplan said Schorling will be sentenced sometime in November. Schorling faces up to life in prison, but Kaplan said it is more likely he will get anywhere from 7 to 50 years in prison. The charge Garton had hoped for is only a 10-year felony.

Schorling pleaded guilty in May to a lesser charge, but that deal was revoked when he tried to escape from the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center in Mt. Clemens that month. His attempted escape is being handled as a separate case.

Lambert's father was pleased with the trial's outcome.

"We're certainly relieved it's over and we're pleased it came out with maximum guilt," Daniel Lambert said. His daughter has recovered from her wound.

Kaplan said in closing arguments Friday before Circuit Judge Peter Maceroni that Schorling went to Romeo High School -- where he was no longer a student -- with the knife intending to kill Lambert, 17, who had been his girlfriend for six months.

Kaplan said Schorling unexpectedly saw Lambert two days before the incident and later told friends he was going to kill her. The couple had broken up four months earlier.

"He had no business in that school," Kaplan said. "He went to that school intending to kill her." After he stabbed her, he ran out of school telling at least one person what he had done. Lambert, who walked into class with the knife still in her back, was seriously injured.

Garton argued that Schorling is a child and that he wasn't hoping to kill Lambert. He said Schorling acted out because Lambert teased him and called him a Nazi.

"She does not want you to know how much she taunted him," Garton told the jury. "That's the purpose. That's why he did it."

That Schorling didn't kill Lambert, Garton argued, supercedes any intent Schorling might have had internally.

But Kaplan said that wasn't an excuse.

"Words are not a sufficient justification for killing someone, or trying to kill someone," Kaplan said. "She could have called him a Nazi every day from June until September. That's still not a defense."

Contact DAN CORTEZ at 586-469-1827 or cortez@freepress.com.

Saturday shooting blamed on gangs

Monday, October 31, 2005

LaNIA COLEMAN
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Mounting hostility between feuding Saginaw gangs appears to have led to a Saturday morning shooting that left a Buena Vista Township teen with a gunshot wound in her chest.

The 15-year-old victim, likely collateral damage in the shootout at Maplevue Apartments, remained in serious condition late Sunday, police said. Doctors treated two injured teens for gunshot wounds and released them from Saginaw hospitals.

Three 17-year-old men from Buena Vista Township and an 18-year-old Saginaw man remained jailed in connection with the shooting, which interrupted a Halloween party about midnight at the apartment clubhouse, 1180 Genei.

Police have said they expect more arrests.

Preliminary evidence indicates that shooters fired from several directions, officers said.

About 100 teens were milling around outside the clubhouse when the bullets started to fly.

Witnesses estimated that shooters squeezed off at least 25 rounds.

The feud between North Side and South Side gang members has left at least three people dead and several others wounded. Not all of the victims were gang members, police said.

Demario Reed reportedly was the first casualty when someone gunned him down July 11, apparently in retaliation for a brawl outside a Kochville Township theater in May.

Gang members seeking to avenge the 17-year-old likely were responsible for the July 14 shooting death of Charles "Chucky" Robinson, authorities have said. Police suspect Robinson, 15, was not the gunman's intended target. He had no known gang affiliations.

Brandy Boose also was not a gang member, but residents say gang members fired indiscriminately into the home where she was sleeping with her infant son July 12. A bullet apparently meant for someone else struck the 20-year-old mother in the head, killing her.

The gang war made its way into Saginaw High when 15-year-old Daniel Foster was shot in a second-floor hallway during lunch hour Oct. 20. The teen continues to recover from his injuries, while a 16-year-old classmate, Clarence W. Russell III, remains at the Juvenile Detention Center waiting to face an attempted murder charge as an adult.

Police have made no arrests in a retaliatory shooting Oct. 24 at Fenton and East Holland. Two teens were injured when gunmen opened fire on Russell's half-brother, Devario Barrera, 17, and two friends, 15 and 18. Barrera escaped harm but the other teens suffered wounds that were not life-threatening.

LaNia Coleman covers law enforcement for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9690.

Granholt Signs Emergency Rules to Help with Heating Costs

Today, in her weekly radio address, Governor Jennifer **GRANHOLM** announced she has signed emergency rules designed to protect consumers who can least afford the expected increases in home heating bills this winter.

Granholt's news release on the topic today made an issue of the fact that her action came just one day after the major oil companies announced record-breaking profits while the nation was reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

"Just as we put on those extra layers for warmth in the winter, my administration will continue to fight for extra layers of security for our seniors, our working families and our most vulnerable citizens during a season that will see much higher energy costs," Granholt said in her address.

The increase in energy costs stem from hurricanes in the gulf, short supply around the nation and increasing demand around the world, all of which can have a devastating impact here at home. The emergency rules will protect consumers who least can afford these sharp spikes in heating and energy costs.

In addition to comments made in her radio address, Granholt said she is outraged over the record profits reported by the major oil companies this week.

"In September, I - along with several of my fellow governors - called on President George W. **BUSH** to act decisively in preventing oil companies from raking in profits at the expense of American consumers during a time of crisis," Granholt said today. "We urged the President to move swiftly to cap corporate oil profits and strictly prosecute any violation of federal anti-trust laws, and take all other possible actions to protect Americans against profiteering. Unfortunately, the administration took no such action and the American people are paying the price."

Granholt noted that the rules she signed today, originally proposed by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), will take effect next Tuesday, Nov. 1 and continue through March 31, 2006 for retail customers of electric and gas utilities subject to the Commission's jurisdiction.

The emergency rules call for the following changes:

- Lengthening the time between the date utility service bills are sent to customers and the due date, making sure people have more time to put a check in the mail;
- Preventing utilities from shutting off service or charging late payment fees for failure to pay an estimated bill by the due date;
- Prohibiting utilities from blocking services to seniors or those on fixed incomes to make sure vulnerable citizens aren't put at further risk.

In addition to the new rules, Granholt has put the state's natural gas suppliers on notice that MPSC will be watching their operations closely to ensure customers are receiving rates that are as low as possible this winter and led a bi-partisan group of 28 governors to ask Congress to fund a significant increase in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding.

The Governor's weekly radio address is released each Friday at 10:00 a.m. and may be heard on broadcast stations across that state through an affiliation with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

MIRS

October 28, 2005

Cox: 'I'm Fighting To Lower Michigan Families' Winter Heating Bills'

Today, Attorney General Mike **COX** announced a settlement reached with SEMCO Energy and Michigan Consolidated Gas (MichCon) to provide customers with up to 75 percent off the utilities' proposed winter heating bill increases.

Cox has challenged Consumers Energy and Aquila's proposed monthly increases of \$42.00 to \$56.60 on customer's winter heating bills.

"The settlement my office reached will significantly reduce families' winter heating bills," said Cox. "Senior citizens and people on a fixed income cannot afford such drastic increases. My office will continue to fight the energy companies to keep utility costs affordable, especially during the holidays."

In a settlement demand letter sent to the four major utilities on Oct. 26, Cox demanded a reduction in the utilities' proposed monthly increases. On Oct. 27, Cox reached a settlement with SEMCO and MichCon that was approved by the Michigan Public Service Commission at 11:30 a.m. today (Case No. U-14401, U-14402).

MichCon sought to increase consumer bills this winter heating season by up to \$102.20 and SEMCO sought increases of \$76.40. Cox negotiated a substantial decrease to Michigan consumer's monthly heating bills by reducing these increases to only \$25.90 for MichCon customers and \$33.04 for SEMCO customers.

The Michigan Gas Cost Recovery Statute (MCL 460.0(h)(10)) allows Michigan's natural gas companies to recover costs such as those associated with the increase in natural gas prices due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Cox's settlement with SEMCO and MichCon spreads a portion of these costs over five months, with the remaining costs to be collected over 12 months beginning in April 2006. Customers of these two utilities should expect to see the first increase on their natural gas bill in November.

October 28, 2005

GRANHOLM SIGNS GAS SHUT-OFF LIMITS

Utilities would be more limited in shutting off heat and would have to give customers more time to pay under emergency rules approved Friday by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

In announcing the new rules on her Friday radio show, Ms. Granholm said the change would help to protect residents from expected spikes in fuel bills. But she also warned utilities that the Public Service Commission would be watching rates closely after profits posted by major oil companies this week.

“We all know that Michigan winters are harsh enough without having your gas or electric service shut off, due to bills that can’t be paid,” Ms. Granholm said in her address. “Just as we put on those extra layers for warmth in the winter, my administration will continue to fight for extra layers of security for our seniors, our working families and our most vulnerable citizens during a season that will see much higher energy costs.”

“With the alarming increases in energy costs since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Michigan’s electric and natural gas customers face dire circumstances this winter,” said PSC Chair Peter Lark when the commission unveiled the proposal last week. “My fellow commissioners and I are greatly concerned about the negative effects these large increases will have on the health, safety and welfare of customers. The emergency rules we established today will help soften the economic blow that residential and business customers will soon face.”

Utilities agreed on the need for programs to protect customers at least for the coming winter.

“We share the same concern that the governor and the Michigan Public Service Commission have about heating costs this winter,” said Len Singer with DTE Energy, parent company for Michigan Consolidated Gas. And he said the emergency rules are similar to some programs the utility already has in place.

Under the rules, utilities would have to allow customers at least 22 days to pay their bills, up from 17 days for residential customers and 21 days for business customers. If the bills are not paid on time, the utility cannot disconnect service if the bill was based on estimated use. And customers with late bills who reach a settlement to pay off those bills cannot be required to pay more than \$50 per month toward the delinquent charges.

The rules also increase the definition of poverty to 200 percent of the federal poverty line, from the current 150 percent, and decrease the amount of the bill to be paid to 6 percent of annual charges from 7 percent.

The emergency rules would expire March 31 unless the commission seeks to make them permanent through the administrative rules process.

But Ms. Granholm also chastised the large oil companies for increasing profits in recent months – and President George W. Bush for not taking action to prevent those high profits. The world's largest oil companies recently reported third quarter earnings increases of between 34 percent and 89 percent.

“In September, I – along with several of my fellow governors – called on President Bush to act decisively in preventing oil companies from raking in profits at the expense of American consumers during a time of crisis,” Ms. Granholm said in a statement. “We urged the President to move swiftly to cap corporate oil profits and strictly prosecute any violation of federal anti-trust laws, and take all other possible actions to protect Americans against profiteering. Unfortunately, the administration took no such action and the American people are paying the price.”

GAS COST INCREASES: Meanwhile, the PSC approved gas cost recovery increases for Michigan Consolidated Gas Company and for SEMCO Energy Gas Company for the remainder of its territory. Beginning in November, MichCon (case No. 14401) will increase the gas portion of its charges to \$11.3851 per thousand cubic feet and SEMCO (case No. 14402) will increase to \$11.2684.

The charges were designed to allow the utilities to cover their energy costs. State law allows utilities to cover only their costs for the gas itself and to earn profits on delivery and other services.

But the increases represented a fraction of what the utilities had originally requested, said Attorney General Mike Cox, whose office participated in negotiations. “The settlement my office reached will significantly reduce families’ winter heating bills,” Mr. Cox said. “Senior citizens and people on a fixed income cannot afford such drastic increases. My office will continue to fight the energy companies to keep utility costs affordable, especially during the holidays.”

October 28, 2005

Governor Signs Emergency Rules to Help with Heating Costs

Renewed Call for Cap on Oil, Gas Company Profits

LANISING – In her weekly radio address, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced she has signed emergency rules designed to protect consumers who least can afford the expected increases in home heating bills this winter. The Governor's action to protect Michigan consumers came just one day after the major oil companies announced record-breaking profits while the nation was reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

"Just as we put on those extra layers for warmth in the winter, my administration will continue to fight for extra layers of security for our seniors, our working families and our most vulnerable citizens during a season that will see much higher energy costs," Granholm said in her address.

The increase in energy costs stem from hurricanes in the gulf, short supply around the nation and increasing demand around the world, all of which can have a devastating impact here at home. The emergency rules will protect consumers who least can afford these sharp spikes in heating and energy costs.

In addition to comments made in her radio address, the Governor today said she is outraged over the record profits reported by the major oil companies this week.

"In September, I – along with several of my fellow governors – called on President Bush to act decisively in preventing oil companies from raking in profits at the expense of American consumers during a time of crisis," Granholm said today. "We urged the President to move swiftly to cap corporate oil profits and strictly prosecute any violation of federal anti-trust laws, and take all other possible actions to protect Americans against profiteering. Unfortunately, the administration took no such action and the American people are paying the price."

Yesterday, ExxonMobil, the world's largest oil company, reported third quarter profits grew 75 percent to almost \$10 billion. Similarly, British Petroleum and ConocoPhillips, the world's second and third largest oil companies, reported record profits: British Petroleum reported quarterly profits grew 34 percent to more than \$6.5 billion; and, ConocoPhillips reported its quarterly profits grew 89 percent, to \$3.8 billion. In 2004 alone, the five largest oil companies together made more than \$80 billion in profits - about \$800 for every household in America.

Granholm noted that the rules she signed today, originally proposed by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), will take effect next Tuesday, November 1 and continue through March 31, 2006 for retail customers of electric and gas utilities subject to the Commission's jurisdiction.

The emergency rules call for the following changes:

- Lengthening the time between the date utility service bills are sent to customers and the due date, making sure people have more time to put a check in the mail;
- Preventing utilities from shutting off service or charging late payment fees for failure to pay an estimated bill by the due date;
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In addition to the new rules, Granholm has put the state's natural gas suppliers on notice that MPSC will be watching their operations closely to ensure customers are receiving rates that are as low as possible this winter and led a bi-partisan group of 28 governors to ask Congress to fund a significant increase in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding.

The Governor's weekly radio address is released each Friday at 10:00 a.m. and may be heard on broadcast stations across that state through an affiliation with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters. The address will also be available on the Governor's Website on Mondays as a podcast for general distribution to personal MP3 players and home computers.

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Heating tips offered

By ERICA KOLASKI
Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - As the winter season approaches, local residents should take note of some recent changes for gas and electric utility customers.

Last week, Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed the following emergency rules to help protect consumers through the cold winter months.

The rules will take effect Tuesday and will continue through March 31 for gas and electric utility companies governed by the Michigan Public Service Commission, said Granholm spokeswoman Heidi Hansen.

Hansen said that the rules will lengthen the time between the date utility service bills are sent to customers and the due date, making sure people have more time to put a check in the mail; prevent utilities from shutting off service or charging late payment fees for failure to pay an estimated bill by the due date; and prohibit utilities from blocking services to seniors or those on fixed incomes.

Faced with the potential of high winter heating bills, local residents may want to consider winterizing their homes.

To avoid the risk of fire or carbon monoxide poisoning and to help heat run efficiently, homeowners should consider having a basic heating system inspection done by a professional.

Helpful heating maintenance can include vacuuming the vents and other heating components; replacing the furnace filter and make future replacements as needed and filling oil or propane tanks in advance.

And for those who enjoy the old-fashioned warmth of a fireplace, chimneys should usually be inspected and cleaned before the first use.

In light of other recent natural disasters and other hazardous winter conditions, local residents may want to keep a few days of emergency supplies on hand.

Cheboygan County Sheriff Dale Clarmont recently offered these suggestions to keep on hand for emergency supplies:

- € Candles and matches or a small butane lighter.
- € Flashlight and batteries.
- € Fill propane tank or buy charcoal for outdoor grills.
- € Battery operated radio or weather radio. Buy extra batteries.

€ Snow blower, shovels, and/or chemicals to melt snow.

€ Containers of bottled water. Non perishable food to last a few days. Be sure you have a hand operated can opener.

€ Paper plates and plastic eating utensils. Paper towels.

€ Extra firewood. Fuel for your generator. Kerosene and kerosene heaters should be used with carbon monoxide monitoring strips.

Homeless people need help, not rumors, as numbers grow

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Sunday, October 30, 2005

There's a rumor going around town. Or so I've been told. In many ways the questions of who is doing what, from where they are doing it, and to whom, are irrelevant. The story is a rumor after all, which means it's unlikely anyone in the chain of communication has researched the idle chatter being traded on the street.

But there is the argument that all rumors, like all stereotypes, have some basis in the truth.

So here is the rumor: Jackson Prison -- the colloquial term for the Southern Michigan Correctional Facility in Jackson -- thinks so highly of Kalamazoo's social programs, such as the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission and Ministry with Community, that it encourages prisoners -- no, actually gives them one-way bus tickets -- to come to our fair city.

There's more.

Supposedly, Kalamazoo's reputation as a social-service mecca has spread to the East Coast, and some prisons there send us parolees, too.

And these people are adding to the burgeoning homeless crisis in Kalamazoo.

Leo Lalonde, the spokesman for Michigan Department of Corrections, is blunt.

"It's not true," Lalonde said. "People from Kalamazoo usually go back to Kalamazoo, or for a prisoner from Jackson who has family in Kalamazoo, we may send him to Kalamazoo. But nobody gets out and we say, 'Here's a ticket to any place you want.'"

Parolees have to have a home placement before they're sent to a community. Usually, they go where they came from, he said.

Still, some think other states might be slipping ex-cons across our borders. New Jersey seemed as likely a suspect as any state, given its reputation for certain family-oriented criminal activity. Matthew Schuman, spokesman for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, is as bemused and direct as Lalonde. "We're not sending prisoners to Kalamazoo," he said. "That's the easy answer. That's not happening."

He did say there's always the possibility of mob witnesses being sent to Michigan with new identities through the federal witness-protection program, but New Jersey has not singled out Kalamazoo to take its ex-cons.

Kalamazoo Gospel Mission's executive director, the Rev. Mike Brown, said the notion of the area being flooded with ex-cons is "15 minutes past ridiculous." The mission's men's residential program is currently serving 27 people, none of whom has been paroled to the program from a prison.

That's not to deny that some people at the mission are on parole and probation, nor is that to deny that sometimes people come to the mission from other places. The mission, Brown said, is there to help people who are trying to help themselves.

But, Brown said, for every person who wants to come to the mission, there is another who refuses its services because of its strict rules. And, in case anybody is wondering, the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission's first goal is to serve residents of Kalamazoo.

Perhaps people are not scared that felons are invading as much as they fear that the homeless are invading. Gazette staff writer Ed Finnerty recently reported that the nights of individual shelter provided by Kalamazoo County homeless shelters are up more than 25 percent from two years ago, to almost 93,000 individual-nights last year.

It's easy to see how rumors can start in the face of such a staggering statistic. That's a lot of people in need, a lot of people looking a little desperate, a lot of people looking as though they have faced hard times.

We can wonder what part of the state or country they came from, but it doesn't matter where the homeless were before they were here. They were homeless wherever that was. They are homeless here. They need help, not rumors.

Columnist Linda S. Mah can be reached at 388-8546 or lmah@kalamazoo Gazette.com.

Woman Dies In Domestic Dispute

Created: 10/29/2005 7:32:10 PM
Updated: 10/30/2005 10:33:28 PM
WZZM 13 Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids - A 42-year-old Grand Rapids woman died Saturday night after someone stabbed her earlier that afternoon.

Diane Dudley was allegedly stabbed by her boyfriend in the chest Saturday. She died just a few hours later in the hospital.

Dudley's son, 19-year-old Anthony Sherard, was also stabbed in the confrontation at the Wealthy Street house.

Sherard ran across the street to the Wealthy Street Bakery to call for help.

A 43-year-old man who lives at the home was arrested. He faces murder and assault charges.

The suspect is scheduled for arraignment tomorrow. An autopsy on Dudley will also happen tomorrow.

Web Editor: Kathy Reynolds, Grand Rapids Metro Reporter

Domestic violence case inspires bill to ban torture

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10/31 By AMY F. BAILEY 36

Associated Press

The Huron County prosecutor thinks he has enough evidence to get a former paramedic who is accused of torturing his blind wife convicted of kidnapping and abuse.

But Prosecutor Mark Gaertner would be more comfortable in his ability to send Pigeon resident Stephen Cline to prison if Michigan had a law banning torture.

Michigan would join California as the only states with a domestic anti-torture law if lawmakers approve a new bill scheduled to be taken up Tuesday by the state

House Judiciary Committee. Rep. Tom Meyer, R-Bad Axe, sponsored the bill.

Cline is accused of altering his diabetic wife's diet and withholding her medication and insulin to drop her blood sugar levels so low she would lose

consciousness.

He then would dress her in provocative clothing, tie her hands and asphyxiate her by placing a plastic bag over her head until she neared death and then revive her, Gaertner said.

Cline videotaped and photographed his wife as she struggled for air and came close to dying, Gaertner said. Cline's wife, who is blind, was unconscious during the incidents and not aware they had taken place, he said.

Gaertner charged Cline with one count of kidnapping and 17 counts of first-degree abuse of a vulnerable adult. The trial is scheduled to begin Dec. 13. If Cline is convicted, he could be sentenced to life in prison.

Meyer's bill would define torture as an act intended to inflict great injury or mental pain and suffering and make it a felony punishable by up to life in prison.

Prosecutors would not have to prove that the victim suffered pain.

Wayne Co. judge told to resolve custody cases

October 29, 2005

BY BEN SCHMITT
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Wayne County judge has been given 60 days to resolve several cases in which children removed from their homes have remained in protective custody for months -- more than a year in one case.

Family Division Judge Sheila Gibson Manning has seven cases that are the focus of a complaint filed last month by a Legal Aid attorney with the state Court of Appeals, asking the court to take over Manning's docket.

In response to the complaint, Wayne County Chief Circuit Judge Mary Beth Kelly has ordered Manning to resolve the cases within two months.

She also directed the presiding judge of court's Family Division to monitor Manning's attendance for the next year, and told Manning to report monthly on case flow.

Manning, while acknowledging delays in the cases, called allegations that she is solely responsible erroneous. She also questioned whether the Court of Appeals has jurisdiction.

"All of those cases involved administrative and procedural reasons as to why they are at the stage they are in," Manning said Friday. She said two cases have already been resolved.

Manning, who has been a judge for seven years, said she has no problem abiding by Kelly's directive.

Kelly said Friday that she has never before issued such a directive to a judge.

"This is a serious situation," Kelly said, adding, "We do intend to monitor Judge Manning's docket very carefully."

Kelly is also asking the Court of Appeals to drop the complaint, saying the delays are being handled in-house.

The complaint centers on an 8-year-old boy who was removed from his father's care June 9 after allegations his father physically abused him, fracturing his arm and injuring his ribs.

The boy's two half-brothers, ages 4 years and 5 months, were removed from the same home five days later.

Various delays have left the children in foster care with a protective custody trial scheduled for Dec. 14.

State law requires that trials in child-protective proceedings must commence no later than 63 days after placement.

Manning said she wanted to let related criminal charges against the children's father play out before resolving the custody cases. She said that she has the authority to delay proceedings for good cause.

"It's the policy of the majority of judges to adjourn neglect proceedings pending outcome of criminal proceedings," Manning said.

Attorney William Ladd of the Legal Aid and Defender Association, who represents the three children and filed the complaint with the Court of Appeals, said Manning allowed other cases to languish for more than 10 months.

In one case, a custody trial has been delayed for 438 days, he said.

"The delays in these cases make a mockery of the time requirements of the applicable court rules and case management guidelines," Ladd wrote in his complaint to the Court of Appeals.

Sharon Claytor Peters, president of the advocacy group Michigan's Children, said court delays could have an adverse effect on the children involved.

"It puts children in real jeopardy and adds to what already is a chaotic life," Peters said Friday.

"When kids don't have a sense of where they're supposed to be, it really creates quite a havoc in terms of their ability to focus and move on with their lives."

Contact BEN SCHMITT at 313-223-4296 or schmitt@freepress.com.

Kalamazoo Gazette
Letters

October 31, 2005

Shoe Fund event was a success

The First Day Shoe Fund, a local grassroots organization, distributed 160 pairs of new shoes to eligible Kalamazoo Public Schools students this fall. This couldn't have been accomplished without the help and support of various members of our community.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to Tom Hamilton/Little Chick Shoes and Byran Spielbusch and Mary Roseboom of Wal-Mart Corp. Through the efforts of Donna Carroll, Bonnie Terrantine, Cathy Ullrey, Charles Parker and Cynda Greenman of the Kalamazoo Community in Schools Foundation, children in need were identified and on-site distribution was made possible.

I would also like to thank those teachers and principals who supported this program and worked with the KCISF personnel in their schools.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without the grant received from Bread for the Journey. They are the ones who believed that all children should be on equal footing. To all who made this first year a success, thank you.

Valerie DENGHEL
First Day Shoe Fund
Kalamazoo

TREATS FROM TEENS

Monday, October 31, 2005

Will Keeler
For the Citizen Patriot

Screams of excitement could be heard Sunday at area shelters as dozens of children were surprised with early Halloween treats and toys.

Local high school students from the Jackson County United Way teen advisory panel delivered candy to youngsters at the AWARE Shelter, the Interfaith Shelter and the Florence Crittenton Center.

"This is a great way not only for the students to earn community-service points for school, but it also brings about a sense of community for them so they can see all aspects of a community," said Shellie Gillespie, coordinator of the advisory panel.

The advisory panel took about \$60 -- money raised from previous fund-raisers -- to buy candy and snacks.

Kelsey Guernsey, a senior at Columbia Central, said she enjoyed participating in the project.

"It is so rewarding to see the reaction from the kids," said Guernsey, 17. "I have been a part of the panel for the past four years and each project is great, especially for the kids."

Guernsey, who was dressed as a witch, gathered with other students who were dressed as a fairy, wizard, princess and witch.

The group paraded down W. Michigan Avenue on Sunday afternoon making stops at the Jackson Interfaith Shelter, AWARE and the Florence Crittenton Center.

Martha Moten, assistant manager at the Interfaith Shelter, was happy to see the guests.

"This is a fantastic surprise for our kids," Moten said. "These are some great role models for the kids here."

Six-year-old A'Nya Rogers was one of the first kids in line to grab a bag of goodies.

"It was nice of them to bring the candy," she said with a smile.

From the Interfaith Shelter, 414 S. Blackstone St., the students made their way to the AWARE Shelter, 706 W. Michigan Ave., and then on to the Florence Crittenton Center, 936 Fleming Ave.

Two children shied away when the students arrived at Florence Crittenton. But they soon perked up when they knew candy was being passed out.

"The kids really get a kick out of this; it's a great way to celebrate Halloween when they might not expect much," said counselor Tory Beck.

Created for Caring announces new director

Monday, October 31, 2005

By Amy Jo Johnson
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

A Bay City-based nonprofit agency that provides assistance for those less fortunate has a new leader - it's third this year.

Connie J. Pratt, 57, of Essexville, has been named the new executive director at Created for Caring. She previously worked as a full-time volunteer coordinator for the agency since April, helping to recruit and organize volunteers.

Prior to working at Created for Caring, Pratt worked for more than three years for the United Way in Saginaw, serving as the finance administration coordinator.

Pratt replaces Rodney Parrott, who served as interim director after former executive director Gretchen Irish resigned her post in mid-September.

Irish, who worked at Created for Caring for five years, cited family and health concerns in her resignation to the organization's Board of Directors.

"I felt the time was right that I could leave. The organization was in a place that I felt I could leave," Irish explained last week.

Parrott, who had served as Created for Caring's director of stewardship, said he only planned to step in as executive for a short time.

"I had never intended to be the long-term executive director," he said.

Parrott also has elected to resign from Created for Caring's staff. He submitted his letter of resignation last week and said he plans to pursue other professional endeavors.

"I think Connie's exactly what they need to go forward," he said.

Robert J. Dunn, president of the Board of Directors said Created for Caring was sad to lose Parrott, who had done much to help the agency, especially when it came to working with grants.

"He was a substantial help to the agency while he was there," Dunn said.

After Irish resigned, it was announced that Created for Caring would conduct a search for a new executive director, but Dunn said the position was never posted.

"We didn't want to linger. We decided we wanted to jump on this thing right away," he said.

Pratt said she had heard that the job was open and she called up and asked if they were hiring.

Dunn said Pratt was offered the job because the staff and board all have great confidence in her and felt she would be perfect for the job.

"We unanimously thought that Connie was the perfect fit," he said.

In her new post, Pratt will oversee a staff of 14 people and numerous volunteers. She also will oversee a variety of programs, including Coats for Kids and helping people with transitional housing needs.

"The people here are exceptional," she said. "It's just so refreshing to work with people who do not put themselves first.

"I'm very excited to be here. I just know that there are great things ahead of us."

- Amy Jo Johnson covers features for The Times. She can be reached at 894-9637 or by e-mail at ajohnson@bc-times.com.

Battle Creek Enquirer

EDITORIAL

October 31, 2005

Roses & Raspberries

ROSES

And a great big thank you to the **lady and gentleman who called S.A.F.E. Place** the morning of Oct. 25 and asked what the shelter needed. Shortly before noon they arrived with bleach, detergent, scouring powder, garbage bags, disposable gloves, paper towels, light bulbs, etc. The clients, staff and volunteers are most appreciative of their generosity and kindness. - **Edite Balks Walter, S.A.F.E. Place volunteer**

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Ken Sikkema: Taxes and jobs, all in the details 'Trigger' plan protects state and gives aid

When the state Senate recently passed a \$1 billion tax cut for businesses that encompass a modest restraint on the growth of state government spending, an interesting debate took place.

A Democratic colleague articulated a vision that has as its premise more state spending. His speech had at its heart the suggestion that state spending on a variety of programs is the most critical issue facing the state.

I have a different vision for Michigan. I see an extremely prosperous Michigan. I see a state of growth and opportunity and high-paying jobs in a vastly changed economy from what we've known. That vision has as its premise the growth and health and vitality of the private sector.

Advertisement

The Renew Michigan plan we passed in the Senate provides tax relief and tax restructuring across the board because we're not willing to put all our eggs in one basket.

That same colleague also spoke of his concern about being in a trough for state revenue and state spending. But there's another trough that I'm more concerned about and that is the one involving job loss. Our unemployment rate is so much higher than the national average; you can't open a newspaper today in this state without seeing another bad headline about some company going into bankruptcy or hemorrhaging jobs.

We need tax relief in this state and we need to break our addiction to constantly feeding a growing state government. Renew Michigan allows state government to grow at the rate of inflation plus 1 percent.

Renew Michigan provides flexibility. It allows the state to freely use federal money as it becomes available. It doesn't tie the Legislature's hands to address a statewide crisis that might require breaking the spending cap. And there's a provision to put money in the state's "Rainy Day Fund."

Renew Michigan must be the right proposal, because some people are saying it doesn't cut government enough while others are saying it cuts government too much. This is a

good plan. It recognizes that you can't just have government spending on economic diversity and job creation in the new economy without substantial tax relief. That's how Michigan is going to be a place that attracts business investment and growth.

This plan cuts business taxes in a responsible fashion that recognizes state government has some other obligations. It also corrects a problem with the governor's tax proposal, which provided a billion-dollar tax increase on growth sectors of our economy to give a billion-dollar tax cut to shrinking sectors.

I've heard the governor say we need a billion-dollar tax cut to create jobs. Doesn't that also mean a billion-dollar tax increase will result in fewer jobs? You can't have it both ways.

We need tax relief for the job providers of this state if we're going to have a growth economy. And we also must address critical government services, particularly education, because that's also part of our future. But mostly we have an obligation to take action on behalf of Michigan's voters. It's the right cuts, the right way, right now.

State Sen. Ken Sikkema is Senate majority leader and a Wyoming Republican.

Published October 30, 2005

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Jay Rising: Governor's plan better for Mich. families

In early February, Gov. Jennifer Granholm laid out a comprehensive plan to create jobs and diversify our economy.

The governor asked the Legislature to work with her to reduce the tax burden on job creating businesses in Michigan; to accelerate more than \$800 million in environmental, transportation and community projects; to invest \$2 billion in diversifying the state's economy; and to make college more affordable by offering every Michigan child a \$4,000 scholarship.

The governor's plan will protect the jobs we have and create tens of thousands of new jobs while allowing us to diversify beyond our critical manufacturing base.

For decades, Michigan's economy has suffered as partisans argued whether it is more important to restructure taxes or maintain the quality of life that brings people and businesses to our state. The governor's plan recognizes that we have to do both. Michigan must have competitive taxes that foster job creation. But we must also have a world-class education system, access to quality health care and a clean environment if we are going to attract new businesses and new jobs.

If we have learned anything over the last decade in Michigan, it is that scattershot tax cuts for business won't protect our state from losing jobs or help us create the new jobs we need. That's why the governor carefully crafted a tax plan that provides long overdue tax relief to our manufacturing firms, while creating incentives for research and development firms that will create the jobs of tomorrow.

In contrast, the tax plan Senate Republicans proposed and quickly passed last week provides little relief to struggling manufacturers, does nothing to address the continued outsourcing of jobs and fails to make sure our business taxes encourage growth.

Repeatedly, Michigan's manufacturers have told us that the state's burdensome personal property tax is both a disincentive to expanding facilities and creating new jobs as well as a financial burden for struggling companies. The governor's plan included a large personal property tax cut to eliminate the disincentive to companies wanting to expand and grow jobs here. The Republican tax plan fails to adequately address this issue, even as Michigan manufacturing firms struggle to stay afloat.

The Republican plan lacks the proper balance between revenues and spending. For example, even though there is a broad consensus in Michigan that we need to invest more

in higher education to grow our economy, the Republican tax plan could foreclose this option.

We won't move Michigan's economy into the future by repeating the failed policies of the past. To move forward, we have to create a pro-jobs tax structure, maintain a high quality of life and develop the job-producing industries of the future in Michigan.

Late last summer, it appeared that through bipartisan dialogue the Legislature was ready to finally act on the governor's plan.

Michigan's economy is too important - Michigan jobs are too important - for foot dragging or political maneuvering to stand in the way. The governor's plan deserves action - today.

Jay Rising is Michigan's state treasurer.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 28, 2005

Granholtm Continues Efforts to Match Workers with Employers; Participates in Job Fair

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholtm today attended the Southeast Michigan Employment, Training and Family Resource Expo held at the Michigan State Fairgrounds. The expo brings together Granholtm’s MI Opportunity Partnership and local initiatives to match unemployed workers with jobs.

“To jumpstart Michigan’s economy and help working families across this state, we must do everything we can to match workers who need jobs with companies that need workers,” said Granholtm. “This expo today is about finding the good paying jobs for people and putting them to work now.”

The expo features space for over 100 health and human service agencies that will provide help with job training, transportation, substance abuse, housing and other critical services that can create barriers for steady employment.

The MI Opportunity Partnership, unveiled by the Governor in her State of the State Address in February, is an effort to connect unemployed citizens with high-demand job vacancies with a goal of placing 30,000 people in jobs this year. More than 250,000 employers were contacted in May and asked to pledge current job openings to the MI Opportunity program. As of this week, almost 24,000 jobs have been pledged and more than 12,000 positions have been filled.

Through MI Opportunity Partnership, the Granholtm Administration has also invested \$17 million in accelerated training for high demand health care professionals. This investment will train more than 1,200 workers today and will expand the state’s ability to prepare Michigan citizens for vital health care jobs tomorrow. In addition, accelerated training is being conducted through four Regional Skills Alliance pilots to train 271 individuals in welding, construction trades, and basic health care occupations. To date, 201 of these individuals have completed training and 134 of them have become employed.

Expo partners include the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Macomb County Department of Human Services, Oakland County Department of Human Services, Wayne County Department of Human Services, Southeast Michigan United Way, Detroit Free Press, Detroit Workforce Development Board, Habitat for Humanity, Inforum, International Union--UAW, Macomb/St. Clair Workforce Development Board, Oakland County Workforce Development Board, Plante Moran, Southeast Michigan Community Alliance, and Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG).

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County unemployment rate falls to 17-month low in September

PUBLISHED: October 28, 2005

By Dan Heaton
Macomb Daily Business Editor

Macomb County's unemployment rate declined to 5.7 percent in September -- the lowest rate in the county in 17 months. The county's rate had not been below 6 percent since April 2004.

The 5.7 rate in September was a full percentage point below the previous September, when 6.7 percent of local workers were out of work and looking for a job. The county's unemployment rate has declined sharply over the past two months, from 7.9 percent in July, to 6.5 percent in August, to September's 5.7 percent. In earlier reports from the state's Department of Labor & Economic Growth, the July unemployment rate had been reported as being at 8 percent, but the number has since been revised downward.

Even with the lower rate in September, Macomb County still has an overall average unemployment rate for the first nine months of 2005 of not quite 7.1 percent. The county had a 6.7 average unemployment rate in 2004.

The September unemployment rate declined in 14 of Michigan 17 major labor markets in September, including a 0.7 point decline in the Detroit region, according to a monthly report by the state.

"The unemployment rate went down or held steady in most areas of Michigan in September," said Rick Waclawek, director of the state Bureau of Labor Market Information & Strategic Initiatives. "In most regions, increases in both state and local government education employment were offset by labor force withdrawal among youth and a decline in summer and tourism-related employment."

September was also the first time in more than two years that Macomb County had a lower unemployment rate than the statewide average. Michigan had 5.9 percent unemployment in September; the Detroit region had a 6.3 percent unemployment rate.

Sunday, October 30, 2005

Macomb County

Officials fear wage plan's tab

Already faced with a yawning deficit, some in county worry about how to pay for new policy.

By Jim Lynch / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- Some Macomb County commissioners have doubts about how the cash-strapped county is going to pay for a controversial living wage proposal approved last week.

The wage plan comes as statistics show more Macomb residents are sliding into poverty. But some say the county faces more pressing budget problems, including a potential \$10 million deficit and a proposed \$92 million expansion of the Macomb County Jail to relieve overcrowding.

Commissioner William Revoir said he was frustrated that his colleagues were ready to approve the wage policy without knowing its cost.

"So we can implement something, not knowing the cost and not knowing which fund we'll use to pay for it?" asked Revoir, R-Clinton Township.

The living wage policy, approved 18-8, affects county employees and those who contract with the county. It sets wages at an hourly minimum of \$9.58 for workers with benefits, and \$12.09 for those without.

Revoir also questioned why the policy does not cover part-time employees, a factor that also bothers Sterling Heights resident John Spence, who works in the auto industry.

"That sounds backwards to me," said Spence, 35. "Full-time workers are probably receiving health coverage and are in a much better position than part-time workers."

County officials said part-time workers were exempted because most of their contracts are negotiated by unions and cannot be altered.

Commissioner Jon Switalski, D-Warren, one of the commissioners who initiated the drive for a living wage policy, argued the quick passage was important.

"I believe there is a harm in delaying this and postponing it," he said, pointing to statistics that show nearly 21 percent of the county's residents have jobs but still require financial assistance to get by. "That harm is to working families trying to pay their bills and put food on their tables."

One county department, Community Mental Health, has estimated the living wage policy would generate a cost increase of at least \$1.9 million for the department next year.

County Finance Director David Diegel said that could add up when the entire county is considered.

"If that \$1.9 million figure is accurate, that's a very significant impact on the budget," he said.

Commissioner Nicholyn Brandenburg, R-Macomb Township, said it's an impact her constituents can't afford.

"In my (district) I have senior citizens who can't buy their medications and eat too," Brandenburg said. "This is going to raise the costs for senior citizens. It's inhumane."

The wage policy will kick in Jan. 1. Macomb County finished last year with a deficit of \$3 million, the first time in a decade officials found themselves in the red at the end of a fiscal year. By the end of 2005, the county will run a deficit in the \$8 million to \$10 million range.

It's unclear how the county will pay for the proposed jail expansion. Chronic overcrowding there has triggered four early releases of nonviolent offenders so far this year.

You can reach Jim Lynch at (586) 468-0520 or jlynch@detnews.com.

Edwards to students: Back programs to fight poverty

Ex-senator suggests wage, labor remedies

Saturday, October 29, 2005

BY DAVE GERSHMAN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Hurricane Katrina exposed the face of poverty in the United States, and college students can help focus national attention on the problems of the poor, John Edwards said Friday at the University of Michigan.

The former U.S. senator from North Carolina and the Democratic nominee for vice president in 2004 was on the last stop of a 10-university, two-week Opportunity Rocks College Tour, a campaign against poverty in the United States.

"There's a window open," Edwards said about the country following the hurricane. "The country is paying attention. Whether they continue to pay attention is up to you."

He said 37 million Americans live in poverty, many of them children.

Edwards suggested specific remedies that he asked the students to support - including raising the minimum wage, empowering working people to organize in their workplaces, and establishing portable housing vouchers so poor people have choices in where to live.

After speaking for almost 25 minutes, Edwards stepped down from the podium on the steps of the Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library and was mobbed by students.

The event originally had been scheduled for a ballroom in the Michigan League, but there were so many requests for free tickets that organizers moved it outside. A policeman estimated the crowd at 2,500.

Edwards shook hands. He chatted with students. And he posed for cell phone pictures.

"I think he addressed a lot of the issues people are ignoring or unsure of," said student Jacqueline London. "I think it was very inspiring."

"It's not anything about him inherently; it's about what he's talking about," said student David Arnold, explaining students' enthusiasm for Edwards.

"It's such an important message," said student Ryan Werder. "It resonates."

Edwards didn't dwell on public policies for most of his talk. Instead, he sketched out the lives of poor people he met around the country. He said they are hard-working. They are often single mothers.

"They're doing everything we believe in in this country," he said, but they cannot make ends meet.

He talked about his own upbringing as the son of a millworker. He had the benefits of a strong family, and went to good public schools and then on to a good state university. But those things aren't available to everybody, he said.

He spoke about the anti-poverty efforts in the 1960s, saying college students were key to making a difference then. Today, the country is again hungry for an important issue to take up, he said.

The problem of poverty in the United States, he said, is a moral issue. He challenged the students

to perform community service and to raise their voices to lead the country in tackling the problem of poverty.

"This is your time," Edwards said. "This is your moment. You can change the country again. You can embrace the great moral issue of our times - the 37 million (Americans) in poverty."

Reporter Dave Gershman can be reached at (734) 994-6818 or dgershman@annarbornews.com.

More help needed this year

Sunday, October 30, 2005

By Jaclyn Roeschke
jroeschke@citpat.com -- 768-4945

Area volunteers say they need more help this year than ever before in securing warm clothes for needy children.

Although more children are signed up for this year's Warm the Children campaign, officials say they have half as many donations for the program as they did this time last year.

More than 900 children registered earlier this month for the program, which uses donations to buy winter gear for families who need financial help.

About \$33,000 has been collected from the community so far, but more is needed, said Gary Klump, the Citizen Patriot's assistant controller.

"To some people that might seem like a lot of money, but we need \$75,000 to accommodate the number of kids signed up so far," Klump said. "And as Christmas comes up, more and more of those signed up need their clothes. There's a lot of families that this is all they get for Christmas." Warm the Children is sponsored by the Citizen Patriot, the Community Action Agency and the Junior Welfare League.

Last year, about 600 children were registered, about \$63,000 was collected, and organizers had a \$10,000 surplus of donations. All of that extra money went for this year's program, but more is needed because there's still a large increase in the number of children signed up.

"It's shocking because it's a lot of children to shop for, when last year it was down from the previous year," said Karen Dods, of the Junior Welfare League. "But we knew we had the extra money and it's great to see more kids are signed up."

Warm the Children is a bit different this year than previous years because hurricane victims will be given priority in the shopping process. Organizers said those families need special support because many lived in warmer climates and don't have winter clothes.

The program is made possible by a host of volunteers who give their time to help needy families shop for their warm clothes.

Through the program, families are given vouchers for about \$80 worth of winter clothing at Meijer. The vouchers are mailed to volunteer shoppers who go to the store with the families and help them purchase the clothing.

Like donations, more volunteers are always needed, Dods said.

As organizers gear up to start shopping within the next two weeks, Brenda Leonard, community services director at the CAA, said the purpose of the program is becoming more clear year after year, as the state's economic climate worsens.

"Over the last three or four years in the community, meeting the everyday financial requirements is becoming hard," she said. "But that, on top of still being able to afford what your family needs to get by, is becoming increasingly difficult for families and individuals."

Economy sours in mouths of hungry

Sunday, October 30, 2005

MIKE THOMPSON
THE SAGINAW NEWS

This isn't the Great Depression of three quarter-centuries ago.

But longtime residents -- agency workers and everyday people alike -- say they don't recall a time when the outlook was so bleak.

The mid-Michigan economy this past summer already was sour, worse than in other areas of the state, a state that in turn is struggling harder than most others.

Then came the Aug. 29 impact of Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast. The disaster registered with anyone tuned to a TV set, and caused heartache for thousands in mid-Michigan who had relatives and friends in the region.

Gasoline prices shot higher for everybody, from suburban "soccer families" with SUVs to low-income custodians or caregivers who motor in rickety rustbuckets.

Soon came word that skyrocketing costs for another kind of fuel, natural gas, will jump home heating prices by about 50 percent this winter.

Delphi Corp. applied the ultimate punishing blow with an Oct. 8 announcement that the company will pursue both bankruptcy and big pay cuts.

"It's like this convergence of so many forces came together all at once," says attorney Terri L. Stangl, director of the Center for Civil Justice, a statewide agency based in Saginaw that tackles issues affecting low-income families.

"Maybe the only positive point is that this may bring about some increased public consciousness," she says.

The average number of people in a Saginaw County household is three. The county has 70,000 families. Department of Human Services figures show that than 14,000 households -- about one in five -- qualify for some sort of cash grants, food stamps, child care or Medicaid. Delphi cutbacks could put another 5,800 families at risk.

Politics and religion

Stangl and her small staff for years have explored issues related to welfare and poverty. They are familiar with the alphabet soup of EIC, the Earned Income Credit, and LIHEAP, the Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program.

Day by day, they follow developments in Lansing and in Washington, D.C., sending out information sheets and position papers.

They also assist individual clients and operate a food stamp information line, (800) 481-4989, that has helped boost Michigan's registration rate to among the nation's highest. For every four families that qualify, three have signed up.

Despite some victories, they sometimes question whether they are making headway.

"Our main issue right now," says staff attorney Terri Winegarden, "is the approach that added spending for Katrina (relief) has to be offset by deeper cuts in health care, nutrition and other key services for vulnerable people. This is all proposed while providing for new and costly tax cuts for the wealthy."

Coleman says she looks not at legislation, but at the Bible.

"I don't care about politics," she says. "No politics for me. I look at it as reality."

"What do hurricanes have to do with politics? We're nearing the end. People don't want to hear it, but everything that's happening is in the Bible."

Coleman worries about her combined General Motors Corp. and Delphi pension, and about a 29-year-old daughter with a disability whom she supports in a separate home.

"I moved so that my daughter could have her own place with her kids," Coleman says, "but I might have to move back over there."

Helping one at a time

Martin J. Humphrey, 46, once worked as a home repair specialist for Michigan State University's Saginaw County Extension. He showed participants how to repair a toilet or tile a kitchen -- or in some cases, how to caulk and weatherstrip for insulation.

Now he operates his own home-repair business. And now that heating bills are so steep, he provides energy-saving demonstrations for customers even when they don't ask.

"I'm helping a lot of people to tighten up, to batten up the hatches," Humphrey says. "I'll do a door or a window, showing them how to do it, so that they can do the rest. That's not good for business because you're taking yourself out of a job, but I'm all for helping people.

"I'm making a difference, little old me. These are the times that test us. If everybody would get more involved instead of sitting back and expecting the government to take care of them, we could all make a difference."

Humphrey was waiting for a red light in Thomas Township nine days ago when a motorist rear-ended him, totaling his truck. His wife, Susan, is a commodities manager who faces a possible job loss because she works for a Delphi supplier. Still, he strives for a positive outlook.

"Yeah, we're in a depression. It started at 9/11, and just when we were starting to recover a little, we went into war in Iraq and that slowed the recovery again," says Humphrey, who served as an Army specialist in South Korea during the late 1970s.

"Now we have the war, the gas prices, the heating bills, Delphi," he says. "It's kind of like my life. When it rains, it pours, but when we're doing good, we're doing great. I still see an end in sight."

Only the beginning

For assistance workers such as Bierman and Bueche, the burden continues to increase.

"Everyone always says that public assistance is a generational thing, from one generation to the next, but we're seeing a lot of new faces," Bierman says.

"I would estimate that 25 percent of the people we've seen during the past year are first-time clients. We don't want to turn anybody away, but I don't know how we're going to serve them all.

"Ten times a day, just walking through our reception area, I hear one of our workers tell a client, 'We're out of (home heating) funds until December.' People are already behind from last winter."

Bueche during the 1980s envisioned Chesaning Area Emergency Relief as a limited operation that would help a small group of households with one-time needs.

"As recently as a few years ago, nobody thought what we have today would be possible," he says.

"This year, we've given out \$22,000 in financial aid to families, plus 750 or more food boxes.

"This is not a government program. This is just a little church-based operation, and we're just getting into the start of the crunch. Now we have to try to live through the winter."

Mike Thompson covers poverty issues for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9691.

City problems limit ability to reach out

Sunday, October 30, 2005

MIKE THOMPSON
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Who is responsible for addressing the problems of poverty?

People of various political beliefs agree that those in hardship should try to help themselves. They support church efforts and nonprofit agencies. They agree, to varying extents, that the federal government should play a role.

But what about City Hall? Is the city simply responsible for police service, fire protection, clean streets, and water and sewer systems? Or does the City Council also have a larger role to help uplift those in need?

Those are questions for council candidates heading into the election Tuesday, Nov. 8.

Of all poverty-related concerns, housing is the issue that most often falls into the laps of elected officials not only in Saginaw, but across the nation. Federal aid may pay for subsidized homes and apartments from time to time, but establishment and enforcement of building codes is a local responsibility.

Council members and candidates discussed housing more frequently during the 1960s and 1970s than they do today. Voters passed a 1967 "open housing" ordinance to prohibit race discrimination. Citizens during the 1970s pushed to combat the alleged lending bias of "redlining," and the council responded by enlisting with financial institutions to establish what now is Neighborhood Renewal Services of Saginaw.

Focus since the early 1990s has shifted to a push-and-pull debate on using a share of federal block grant money for police, or for social and youth agencies.

This year's block grant allotment is \$3.54 million. If the money came with no strings attached, a majority of council members would use the bulk of the sum for the basic city budget, primarily to rehire police officers and firefighters. But the "feds" have their rules and use of money for basic services is prohibited.

This year's share in the controversial "community services" category was \$552,000. The council voted \$298,000 for community policing and \$224,000 for a group of 12 nonprofit agencies. Councilman Daniel G. Soza Jr., as he did last year, proposed \$82,000 for police and said the agencies should get more. He then voted with Roma Thurin and Willie Haynes against the budget's larger share for law enforcement.

Facing criticism from police supporters, Soza now tells campaign audiences he has "authorized more block grant money for police than any other council member." His statement is true, but only because his 12-year tenure is the longest.

He acknowledges when questioned that he favors the nonprofit agencies more than most other council members. He emphasizes that he is not anti-police, but he notes that law enforcement -- unlike the nonprofits -- receives millions of dollars in the city's larger general budget.

Housing hasn't disappeared from the agenda. For the past three years, the focus has shifted to start removing a record 500-plus abandoned structures. Hundreds of thousands of block grant dollars that formerly went for repairs are now spent for demolitions.

The Saginaw News asked council candidates about housing, block grants and poverty issues in general.

Here are their responses:

Four four-year terms

David W. Barnes, 48, a real estate agent with Century 21 Signature Realty:

"We need to run the city government as a business, and work with every possible entity to attract more business to our city.

"For housing improvement, we must work with developers, entrepreneurs, state government and county government to explore options for land purchases on foreclosures. We should campaign to get the neighbors involved. Part of the solution is to work with each other.

"Agencies that receive block grants are not in favor of that money going to police, but it's very important for Saginaw to have good public safety for the image of the city. I favor spending block grant money for the community policing of years gone by, when we had substations that were a great asset to the city.

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"I'm definitely for developing better youth programs, but we can do that by involving the school system, parents and volunteers."

Paul M. Bartholomew, 38, a project specialist with Wolohan Lumber:

"A lot of communities with abandoned houses put them up for auction, and whoever buys one is told right up front that there are certain guidelines, that they have one year to either raze the building or bring it back up to code.

"I've worked on five different Habitat Blitz Builds, and those small areas are beautiful, like beacons in the night. The neighboring homeowners start to take pride, paint, put up siding, clean

up yards. It's contagious. We should reward anyone who wants to make a difference by selling them abandoned property for next to nothing.

"I'm surprised we're not welcoming hurricane victims with open arms, saying, 'Welcome to the community, we want to be your new home.' We know they would bring federal money with them to help them get back on their feet, and I'm surprised I haven't heard the council talk about that as a way of attracting new people."

Greg Branch, 48, vice president and creative director for Prancing & Ewend:

"The world's largest, richest, most powerful government has failed in numerous attempts to fight poverty. Will a small one teetering in bankruptcy succeed?"

"City Hall's role in fighting poverty and blight is to focus on its 'core business' of providing high-quality public safety and utility services, and enforcing laws that protect citizens and their property, property values and quality of life. That builds a city in which even affluent people want to live, generating revenue and economic opportunity."

"Block grant funds should be used to cure the disease, not treat the symptoms. That divide is far more complex than police vs. youth/social spending."

Talu M. Calhoun, 57, a retired cook for the Buena Vista School District and the Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel:

"The City Council should reach out to all people of all incomes. The members can't just look at where the money's going, the budget. They have to start by meeting with people. How are you going to get any feedback if you're not dealing directly with citizens? When neighbors have disputes, the City Council could reach out to all of them."

"When it comes to housing, come on, city, we've got to do something. Who do these abandoned homes belong to? They are a public safety issue, just like crime. They chase people out of the community. Nobody wants to live next to a boarded-up, broken-down home."

"I'm from Detroit. One of the worst things in Detroit is the potholes. Saginaw doesn't have as many potholes as Detroit, but the housing conditions are even worse."

Larry A. Coulouris, 79, retired owner of Larry's Lounge:

"The first step to fighting poverty is to attract and retain business and industry, because without business and industry there is no employment."

"There has to be a way to hold landlords more accountable for the condition of their properties. You've got good landlords but you've also got slumlords."

"I'd like to see more incorporation of vacant lands that are tax-reverted being acquired and donated to the owner of an adjacent house that is stable. That way the person can expand their property to have more room for a lawn, a garden, a children's play area or a garage. This also would address the crowding of the small lot frontage that much of the city was built upon. This step, combined with stronger neighborhood associations, would help prevent any further blight."

Bradley P. Eichstaedt, 44, an environmental attendant for Covenant Medical Center:

"As a council person I'm going to serve the public in any and every role possible, and that includes doing anything possible to help any individual in need, even if on a personal basis."

"I would be inclined to give more than half of the block grant money (in the public services category) to community policing, and then the remainder to the agencies. We need activities for the youth, but right now with all the violence that is going on, public safety and police are the most important."

"Homeowners and landlords need to take more responsibilities for their properties, and to make sure that they don't get rundown. There should be penalties for those who don't."

William L. Federspiel, 37, a Saginaw Township police officer:

"City Hall does play a role in combating poverty, but the most important role is community involvement, through people working at the soup kitchen or donating clothing and other items to people who don't have as much.

"The city has had to squeeze out a lot of the money for social-type programs and even recreation, but as council members we can be leaders.

"I would like to see a police/fire millage get passed so that we can use federal block grant money for things other than police, but if we don't have that luxury, the block grants are going to come down to what will benefit the city more.

"For housing, I don't buy the argument that we have to pay to tear down abandoned structures because we can't collect from the owners. We need to put the word out that owners will be held responsible, and I believe that would lead to a big change."

Monique Lamar Silvia, 45, director of the New Alternatives Youth Service Center:

"We have to compel people to feel a desire to come in and rebuild the city. We're going to have a high poverty rate for as long as we don't have businesses here that are hiring.

"We have to compel businesses to come in and compel them to stay. We have to tell them the good things about Saginaw. A lot of people look at your City Council and other government institutions before they bring in a business. When they see that our government is being run right in the city of Saginaw, I believe they will bring businesses here.

"If some of these abandoned houses are in any way viable and we can bring them up to code, we could make them available to some of the people in our city, or even to victims of these horrendous hurricanes. If they're not viable, tear them down."

Daniel G. Soza Jr., 57, an academic guidance counselor at Michigan State University:

"Our federal government, through our block grants, mandates us to play a role in fighting poverty. The City Council is responsible for all people, poor or not poor, all races of people, all sides of town.

"The issue can be as simple as working with people to pay their water bills. We need to understand when people are in difficult situations and do what we can to help people work things out. Plus, we are in a position to partner with the churches and the agencies to help the conditions of low-income people.

"I can't speak if other council people feel this is their responsibility or not, but my position is that it is our responsibility to do what we can to work with those who are less fortunate."

Rev. Otis O. Washington Sr., 59, pastor of Holy Communion Gospel Center:

"Saginaw's high poverty rate is an embarrassment to the entire community. The council most certainly can make a way or contribute to fighting poverty. It can provide the leadership and facilities to enable our community to do those necessary things.

"We do not have a choice. We have to determine our priorities, plan what to do, and stay focused and execute the plan.

"The block grant decisions concerning more police, as opposed to more social and youth spending, have to be prioritized based upon need. One should not cancel the other out in terms of whether we as a community will address these issues -- only when."

Andrew Wendt, 31, a band teacher at Saginaw's Arthur Hill High School:

"First -- working hand in hand with local, county, state and federal officials -- we must commit ourselves to see that we have a sound economic development plan. When we buy buildings we must do something with them, instead of buying them and doing nothing with them.

"I see poverty every day as a school teacher. That's why I'm running. I'm sick of it. We have to do better for our people.

"Is the block grant money being spent, or are we sending some of it back? Do we have a system to tear down houses and give people the lots? It's got to be done and it's not happening.

"We should take an approach similar to the way they cleaned up New York City, by fighting crime and making sure people of Saginaw feel safe. That's the only way we're going to have redevelopment."

One two-year term

Robert Elliott, 59, a professional pianist and retired mortgage broker:

"We have to get back into the bricks and mortar. If you build the foundation, you bring in the businesses. You have to have the infrastructure for improvement. You've got to revitalize the private sector.

"When you get to the blight situation in Saginaw, nearly 50 percent of the housing is rental, and so we have to make landlords accountable. They have to stay on top of their problems, and the council must lead by example.

"I favor the social and youth programs for block grants, because the Police Department is top-heavy. We need to get Knothole baseball and youth sports revived, but there's been nothing but talk, nothing's been done. We need to give the young people something to do."

Earl G. Jesse, 75, a retired meat cutter and inspector:

"No. 1, the city should apply for U.S. and state grant funds, such as food stamps and food commodities, which can help.

"No. 2, I favor money being spent for both social programs and for police and fire. We have about all of the police and fire we can afford."

Amanda J. Kitterman, 33, a teacher at Saginaw's Arthur Eddy Academy:

"If we work to increase economic development and bring jobs to the city, it can be a domino effect which leads to people buying houses here, sending their children to schools here. Then we would also have the revenue to keep our city services in good standing.

"Blight is connected to poverty, but it also is an issue of safety and civic pride. I know it's expensive to tear down abandoned houses and buildings, but if tomorrow we could tear down all of them that can't be saved, imagine what an improvement that would be. Using block grant money is one way, and the plan for a county land bank authority also seems like a good idea.

"I'm in favor of spending the block grant money to best meet the needs of the city. If police are the No. 1 priority, we must consider that, but we need to do all we can to preserve the social and youth programs that are also important in preventing crime."

Mike Thompson covers city government for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9691.

Ann Arbor News

Letters

October 31, 2005

Don't expect unending gratitude for donations

Poverty in the United States is an enigma to the majority of Americans living in relative comfort. Americans reached into their wallets and donated time to help the thousands of people displaced by recent natural disasters. However, an interesting national character has developed around the concept of giving.

A common trend is to motivate people to give based on self-satisfaction of being able to help those people in need. This is a legitimate and true reflection. However, an American disposition has become more evident as it relates to charity for those in the United States and around the rest of the world with both individual and governmental assistance. Simply, we do it for our own self-development or self-interest. We expect a warm fuzzy feeling from the gratitude received from those in need who often feel they have been exploited by us who expect affectionate hugs in appreciation for giving.

New Orleans is an example of this trend. Any visual observation showed that the people most affected were urban poor people. People who did not have the wherewithal to evacuate as others were able to in the same situation. Now, people from the North are helping in great numbers, and there is no more noble charity than donating time. However, do not expect the people in need to show unending graciousness to people who represent a society that showed little empathy towards them historically, and a society that is further separating itself between rich and poor. Time donors with self in mind will be disappointed by a lack of a welcome parade and by the reactions they get from the people they are helping.

Ken G. Martin, Ann Arbor